



804 Area Code Exhaust Relief

Frequently Asked Questions

1. **What is area code exhaust?**

When an existing area code, such as 804, nears the assignment of all available phone numbers. In short, we are running out of available numbers under the 804 area code.

2. **What happens when we are close to an area code exhaust?**

The NANPA contacts the Commission and industry to begin the relief planning process. The relief planning process involves an industry plan for customer education about the transition and for preparation of the telecommunications networks for implementation of the new area code six months in advance of the anticipated exhaust date, which in this case is the third quarter of 2024.

3. **How are the numbering resources being depleted in area code 804?**

Subscriber growth and the expansion of services requiring phone numbers eventually exhausts the numbering resources available within an area code. Every cellular provider (this includes tablet devices with cellular service), wireline provider, alarm service provider, and voice over the internet (VoIP) phone service provider is assigned numbers from those available in each area code.

4. **Who decides to change my area code?**

The Telecommunication Act of 1996 gave the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) jurisdiction over the telephone numbering plan in the United States. From this authority, the FCC established the NANPA. However, the FCC delegated authority to state regulatory commissions to resolve matters involving implementing new area codes. The actual assignment of the specific new area code number comes from the NANPA.

5. **What would the all-services distributed overlay entail?**

The all-services distributed overlay would superimpose a new area code over the same geographic area covered by the existing 804 area code. NANPA will assign Central Office codes (also called CO codes, the 3 digits that follow an area code number) from the new overlay area code once all assignable CO codes from the 804 area code are exhausted. All existing customers would retain their current area code in the overlay area and would not have to change their 804 area code and seven-digit telephone number.

6. **How would an all-services distributed overlay affect customer dialing habits?**

In a contiguous geographic area where only one area code exists, that area code is

assumed to be part of the phone number by default. Number 555-1234, for example, is assigned to only one unique account in a geographic boundary assigned to that single area code. Where two or more area codes are assigned within the same geographic area, the area code cannot be assumed. Using the same example, 555-1234 could be assigned to two separate users; one in each of the two area codes. Therefore, additional information (dialing the area code) is required to correctly route calls to the intended call recipient. The 804 area code transitioned to mandatory 10-digit dialing with the implementation of 988 – the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – in July 2022.

7. How has Virginia handled this issue in the past?

In 1996, the 804 area code went through a geographic split, and the 757 area code was first established. Facing exhaust again in the 804 area code, on December 1, 2000, the Commission approved a geographic split as the relief method for the 804 area code (Case No. PUC-1999-00159); the western section of the then current 804 area code was assigned a new area code, 434, while the eastern section, including metropolitan Richmond, kept the 804 area code. While the Commission has approved both options (geographic overlay or geographic split), it should be noted that there has not been a geographic split implemented in the United States since 2006 (in New Mexico).

8. Once the Commission makes a decision, what happens?

A Final Order will be issued by the Commission that also approves or modifies the requested schedule for implementing the approved plan. Education will be provided in the 804 area by both the NANPA and the Commission once a new overlay code is announced.

9. Is there someone I can contact with any questions?

Yes. Contact Nicole Mansfield at 804-371-9613 or Shepelle Watkins-White at 804-371-9050. Both can also be reached via the Commission's toll-free number (within Virginia) at 1-800-552-7945 (select Option 4 for the Division of Public Utility Regulation and ask for Nicole or Shepelle).